Thursday September 27 06:00 PM EDT

The Return of Censorship: War Means Never Having to Tell the Truth

By Cynthia Cotts Village Voice Writer

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Something is burning this week, but it's not the site of the former World Trade Center. It's what's left of the First Amendment—and every self-respecting journalist should sign up for the rescue mission. Of course, by the time the first war of the 21st century is over, there may not be much left of what liberals used to call free speech.

In its place has come a heinous kind of propaganda in which antiwar sentiment is dimmed and right-wing pundits denounce their counterparts on the left as madmen and enemies-from-within. According to the party line, the public must choose: Either give up your right to free speech or live in the terrorists' camp forevermore. And since the public is willing to make the sacrifice, goes the argument, the press should be, too. During wartime, you see, anyone who criticizes the government is a traitor, and any journalist with access to military intelligence a potential threat to national security.

The fallout started soon after the WTC attack, when the Justice Department sought the power to tap voice mail and e-mail without a court order. According to Paul McMasters, First Amendment ombudsman for the Freedom Forum, "In such an atmosphere, voices of dissent grow silent, probing questions by the press are viewed as unpatriotic and subversive, and whistle-blowers within the government are quieted."

Indeed, McMasters says, if a proposed ban on leaks of classified information had been in place last week when Orrin Hatch told reporters that the U.S. had intercepted a call from a suspected terrorist, Hatch "could be facing a felony charge." The Pentagon was not pleased and the White House quickly stanched the information flow to Congress.

Fear of being blacklisted may explain why mainstream media are downplaying all kinds of stories that connect the WTC attack to ill-conceived homegrown policies—from America's decision to train Afghan rebels in the 1980s to U.S. support of Israel's crackdown on Palestinians to U.S. sanctions against Iraq, which are believed to have caused the deaths of some 500,000 children.

Those are uncomfortable stories to tell. But journalism is not a popularity contest, and in a democracy, there is no requirement that we offer unconditional support for a war. "The prosecution of war involves political decisions," says David Corn, Washington editor of *The Nation*. "The commander in chief need not be micromanaged, but he also need not be given a blank check. The media should do all it can to provide the full context of the decision-making process."

All the same, it's not easy to cover a war that is largely waged undercover. According to recent reports, Operation Infinite Justice will combine air attacks with small commando raids by Special Forces troops trained in the arts of

kidnapping and assassination. The troops are already assembling at remote air bases in Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and northern Pakistan, from which helicopters will drop them into Afghanistan.

Such raids are impossible to cover. "If they kill five people and they take out a terrorist cell somewhere," says Corn, "the Pentagon is not going to have a press conference. They don't disclose this stuff at all."

The challenge of covering a covert war will only be made harder by media restrictions that were imposed by then defense secretary Dick Cheney during the Gulf War. In accord with Cheney's 1991 ground rules, a limited pool of reporters was given access to combat zones. Pool reporters were chaperoned at all times by a public affairs officer, and their dispatches were censored to prevent the release of "sensitive" information. Soldiers were banned from giving off-the-record interviews, a practice that had seriously damaged military PR during the Vietnam War. Critics say the point of such censorship is to hide military flaws.

According to McMasters, some top Pentagon people continue to believe that the Vietnam War failed precisely because "the press had too much freedom to cover it, and the American people got too much information." From the point of view of these cynics, Dan Rather wrote in the *Harvard International Review* this past spring, reporters are potential adversaries who must be spoon-fed lies with the greatest care and precision.

During the Gulf War, the mainstream media's willingness to accept the new censorship led to an "ignominious defeat," says John R. MacArthur, publisher of *Harper's* and the author of a book on censorship during the Gulf War. For example, the media exaggerated the success of U.S. bombing raids and downplayed enemy casualties. CNN's Ted Turner was one of the few who defied the press rules, says MacArthur, by allowing Peter Arnett to continue broadcasting out of enemy territory in Baghdad.

In 1991, *Harper's*, *The Nation*, and the *Voice*, among others, sued the government, claiming that Gulf War restrictions violated the First Amendment. But none of the TV networks or major dailies signed on, and the lawsuit was dismissed by a judge who deemed the issues important but better left for another day. "All I know is, my fellow publishers are very bad about this," MacArthur sighs. "They imagine that they'll beat the competition by ingratiating themselves with the Pentagon."

In 1992, press reps met with Cheney to renegotiate the restrictions. But MacArthur calls the meeting a "face-saving effort" that changed nothing, and McMasters concurs.

Under the legal doctrine of prior restraint, the government must meet a very high threshold before it can stop the media from publishing a particular account. For example, if the news report revealed troop movements during war, that would be considered a real threat to national security. But very few government secrets are so precious. In 1971, when the U.S. government tried to stop *The New York Times* from publishing a secret study of the Vietnam War, the Supreme Court allowed the printers to roll.

Historically, says MacArthur, "no reporter has ever committed treason," that is, reported a story that damaged military operations or put troops in danger. On the contrary, the press tends to exercise voluntary restraint. In 1961, the *Times* knew about the Bay of Pigs attack before it happened, but toned down the story at President Kennedy's request. Kennedy later told the *Times*' publisher, "I wish you had run everything on Cuba. I'm sorry you didn't tell it at the time."

So far, the ground rules for the new war have not been announced, but indications are not good. On September 19, the Taliban ejected CNN's Nic Robertson, the last Western journalist in Afghanistan, saying his safety could not be guaranteed. Rumor has it the Pentagon doesn't want *any* pool reporters this time around. The Department of Defense's Captain Riccoh Player did not return a call for comment.

Given the likely media blackout, MacArthur predicts, "This may turn out to be the freelancer's war." But even a brave loner who gets across the Afghani border could be ratted out by a competing pool reporter or arrested by a U.S. battalion. Says MacArthur, "This may be the first war where an American reporter is killed or garroted by a Green Beret for getting in the way."

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Politics Headlines

Thursday October 11 3:23 AM ET

Lawmaker Pushes Disaster Amendment

By JIM ABRAMS, Associated Press Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) - The Constitution should be amended to adjust to the new age of mass terror and ensure a smooth succession should large numbers of lawmakers be killed, Rep. Brian Baird says.

Baird, D-Wash., said Wednesday that he is proposing a constitutional amendment to give governors appointment powers if one-quarter or more of the House's 435 members are killed or otherwise incapacitated in a terrorist attack.

``We live in a time where we know people have great hatred for our people and our country and our Constitution,'' Baird said. ``And we live in a time of tremendously destructive weapons.''

The Constitution states that governors fill seats vacated when a senator dies or leaves office before his term ends. But in the case of the House, the Constitution requires a direct election. With the time needed to hold primaries and general elections, House seats are sometimes left vacant for months.

Baird's proposal would change the Constitution to give governors the authority to appoint new House members as well.

A governor would have seven days to appoint House members to 90-day terms. Special elections would be held within that 90-day period.

Baird said he had talked to senior members from both parties about his proposal. Without endorsing the amendment, they ``recognized the potential seriousness of the situation and the need to address it.''

Every year, legislators introduce dozens of bills to amend the Constitution, but they are almost always unsuccessful. The Constitution has been amended only 27 times in more than 200 years, including the 10 articles of the Bill of Rights. The last amendment, ratified in 1992, stated that any pay raise legislators vote for themselves won't occur until after an intervening election.

The Constitution is amended after approval by two-thirds of both the House and the Senate and ratification by three-fourths of state legislatures.

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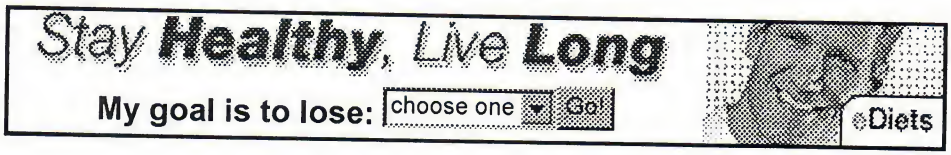
Lawmaker Proposes Disaster Amendment (October 10)



World Headlines

Sources: Reuters | AP | The New York Times | ABCNEWS.com

Thursday October 11 6:45 AM ET

Iraq Says Warning From U.S. Diplomat Is 'Stupid'

By Hassan Hafidh

BAGHDAD (Reuters) - Iraq has dismissed as ``stupid" a warning it received from United States not to take advantage of the Western campaign against Afghanistan to launch military action in the region.

In a rare meeting with Iraqi diplomats, the chief U.S. envoy to the United Nations, John Negroponte, warned on Sunday night that Iraq would pay a heavy price if it used the current situation to act against its own population or any neighboring states.

The Iraqi government on Thursday made public the text of a the reply delivered to the U.S. mission by its ambassador to the United Nations, Mohammed Aldouri.

``Your message is stupid. Iraq is not afraid of you or anyone else when it has a right to claim. What you warned about is not on Iraq's agenda," Aldouri said.

``Iraq is vital and powerful. It is not an opportunistic country. Your administration has not learned from the past," Aldouri said.

The unusual encounter at the United Nations, revealed to Reuters by senior U.S. and foreign diplomats, began with a visit to Iraq's U.N. mission by Negroponte, who read from a prepared text.

On Monday, Aldouri went to the U.S. mission and read his reply.

U.S. officials and diplomats said the United States was concerned Iraq might move at home against rebellious Kurds, as it has several times over the past two decades, or any of its neighbors. Baghdad attacked Iran in 1980 and invaded Kuwait a decade later.

The United States has said there is no hard evidence linking Iraq to the attacks against the World Trade Center in New York and the Pentagon in Washington.

But some in the administration of President Bush believe the war on terrorism should also be aimed at Iraq to make sure it is not developing weapons of mass destruction.

Baghdad has not condemned the suicide attacks on New York and Washington. Aldouri told the U.N. General

Assembly last week it would be hypocritical for Iraq to do so.

Iraq, whom Washington regards as a ``sponsor of terrorism," has denied any link with the attacks or with the prime suspect, Saudi-born Islamic militant Osama bin Laden.

A U.S.-led coalition forced Iraq to withdraw from Kuwait in 1991. Since then, U.S. and British aircraft have been patrolling ``no-fly" zones that cover large parts of Iraq.

Washington says the zones are necessary to protect their Kurdish and Shi'ite populations from attack by the central government. Baghdad says hundreds of civilians have died in Western air raids on targets on the zones.

An Iraqi military spokesman said on Wednesday that Iraq's upgraded air defenses had shot down a third American unmanned plane over the southern fly zone. The U.S. military acknowledged the RQ-1B drone was missing.

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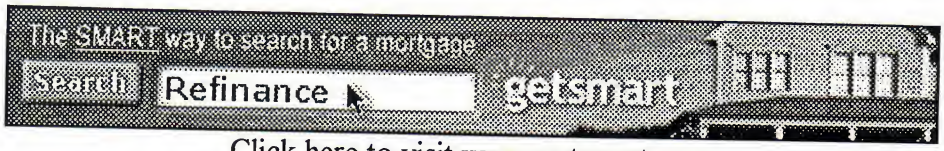

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Top Stories Headlines

Thursday October 11 12:26 AM EDT

Cheney Out of Sight, But in the Loop

By Carter M. Yang ABCNEWS.com

Vice President Dick Cheney has been largely hidden from public view since the war on terror began, but he does not appear to have diminished in the least in his role as one of Bush's most trusted advisers.

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Vice President Dick Cheney, a central figure in the White House war room, has been largely hidden from public view since America's battle with terrorism began nearly a month ago.

When the commander in chief launched the first wave of airstrikes against terrorist and military targets in Afghanistan on Sunday, the vice president was whisked away to an undisclosed location outside the White House complex as a security precaution.

White House officials would offer no hint at to where Cheney is or when he might return.

"He does remain at a secure location … for security purposes," press secretary Ari Fleischer told reporters today. "It's a reflection of the times that we're living in."

But Cheney's distance from the president does not appear to have diminished in the least his role as one of Bush's most trusted advisers and a key member of his inner circle .

'If Something Happens to the President … '

When two hijacked airliners struck the World Trade Center the morning of Sept. 11, the president was preparing to give a speech on education at an elementary school in Sarasota, Fla, and Cheney was at his office in the West Wing of the White House.

By the vice president's own account, it was only after conferring with him that President Bush decided to offer his first public remarks on the carnage, calling it an "apparent terrorist act."

It was also Cheney who urged the president not to immediately return to the Washington and instead head to Offutt Air Force Base in Nebraska, home to a fortified underground command bunker. Cheney was rushed to a secure, underground area beneath the White House.

After Bush returned to the White House, the vice president was evacuated to the Camp David presidential retreat in Maryland.

In a television interview the following Sunday, Cheney explained why.

"My basic role as vice president is to worry about presidential succession," he said on NBC's *Meet the Press* . "My job, above all other things, is to be prepared to take over if something happens to the president."

Since then, Cheney has made only one public appearance: at a photo op at the White House last Tuesday as he and the president met with congressional leaders to discuss an economic stimulus package aimed at reviving the slumping economy — a proposal he reportedly helped to engineer. Cheney also appeared in a photo released by the White House last week of a National Security meeting.

The vice president has been conspicuously absent from a number of high-profile events, such as Bush's Sept. 20 address to a joint session of Congress and the swearing in of Tom Ridge as the director of the new Office of Homeland Security in the White House East Room — a ceremony Cheney had originally been slated to perform.

Alternative Explanations?

White House officials say there is no specific and credible terrorist threat against Cheney, but the indefinite separation of him and Bush is being prompted by Secret Service concerns.

It has been standard practice for decades for the president and vice president not to fly on the same aircraft or to be out of the United States at the same time. But that the agency responsible for protecting the two leaders has urged them to keep a healthy distance between themselves while in the country is extraordinary.

Some, including Republican supporters of the Bush administration, have speculated the vice president's low profile has to do with his health — a notion the administration has repeatedly denied. Cheney has suffered four heart attacks — the most recent one after last November's election, when it was still not certain who had won — and this summer had a device known as a "pacemaker plus" installed in his chest.

Others have suggested the White House may have made a conscious decision to lower the vice president's profile during the current crisis to guard against an impression that Cheney, a far more experienced government official than his boss, is calling the shots in the anti-terrorism campaign.

But the administration insists Cheney's relocation from the vice president's official residence at the U.S. Naval Observatory in Northwest Washington to a secure, undisclosed site is purely a security precaution.

"It's … a reflection of the importance of making sure that all security arrangements are [made]," Fleischer said today.

Cheney's Influence Undiminished

Even in seclusion, Cheney remains arguably the most influential vice president in history. He has gone unseen by the public, but not unheard by those who matter most during this time of crisis.

Fleischer pointed out to reporters Tuesday that the vice president is being kept "fully and completely informed of all events." Officials say Cheney continues to participate in regular meetings — including national security briefings — with the president and key administration officials via secure videoconference.

And the vice president has been working the phones with foreign leaders — including on the first day of the bombings — helping to build and keep together the international coalition arrayed against Osama bin Laden's al Qaeda terrorist network.

That is a critical task to which he — along with Secretary of State Colin Powell , the former chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff — is almost singularly suited, having served as defense secretary during the 1991 Gulf War, when the

Kuwait.

Cheney also continues to serve as one of the administration's chief liaisons to Capitol Hill.

According to *Time* magazine, when an aide told the vice president last week that reporters were asking where he was, Cheney smiled and said, "Don't tell them."

ABCNEWS Political Director Mark Halperin contributed to this report.

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